SOC 510/610 SOCIOLOGY OF MENTAL HEALTH & ILLNESS
Fall 2019, Wednesdays 2:00-4:50 meeting in 265 Cramer Hall
Professor: Melissa Thompson, Ph.D.
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COURSE DESCRIPTION
The interests of many disciplines converge around issues of mental health and psychological disorder: sociology, epidemiology, psychology and psychiatry, and various neurosciences—to mention a few. The sociological study of mental health and illness is uniquely different from the orientations of other disciplines in that it focuses on (1) identifying the social conditions that affect psychological well-being and (2) describing the processes linking the social conditions to their psychological effects. The dual aims of this course are to provide both the theoretical foundations necessary for the study of societal effects on individuals’ well-being and a familiarity with relevant sociological research.

COURSE ORGANIZATION
For each topic, I will provide a brief introduction and overview of the relevant sociological history, controversies, and debates. We will then turn to a seminar discussion of the readings, based on a series of discussion questions formulated by members of the class. The success of this class depends largely on your active and thoughtful participation, and I expect that much of the learning will occur during seminar exchanges. Every student will write up weekly response papers to the required readings and every student will help lead two seminar discussions. A final research paper will be written and discussed/presented in our final two class meetings and the final paper draft will be submitted during finals week.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
1. **Class participation** (25 percent of your course grade.)
   - **Response papers.** For each week’s readings, you will write a 1-2 page response paper. In this paper you will critically appraise the readings, focusing on how well and in what ways the authors contribute to our understanding of sociological aspects of mental health. In doing your critical analysis, you should generate some questions derived from the readings that you think are important and/or fruitful to discuss with the class as a whole. In general, you may focus on 1-2 readings, but attempt to make connections among all the week’s readings, and to prior class readings and discussions. Note page numbers/passages, if any, that specifically generate your reactions and questions.
     - Note that you may include personal or emotional reactions to the reading(s) if you want to share these, but the content of your analysis should primarily be based in insights that use a sociological lens.
     - These response papers will inform our in-class discussion.
     - These should be written professionally but can be informal.
     - **Bring a hard copy of your response papers to each week’s class.**
• By having prepared a response to the material in advance, it is my hope that you will be better prepared to engage in productive class discussions and that you will gain more from each other’s analyses than you would otherwise.

• **In-Class Discussion.** All students must enter the classroom each week with a solid understanding of the assigned readings and thoughtful critiques of them. All must actively contribute to seminar discussions by asking questions, challenging what class members have said, making connections to material from other courses, and relating the course material to your own research projects.

2. **Facilitating Course Discussion** (15 percent of your course grade.)
   • For weeks 2-10, we will have designated facilitators of class discussion. I will pass around a sign-up sheet on the first day of class, and you will each sign up for two class sessions. In general, facilitators are responsible for preparing discussion questions prior to class and leading discussion during class. During class, the facilitators are responsible for identifying and sustaining discussion topics, as well as distilling themes from seminar participants’ comments during class. Students who serve as facilitators for particular class meetings may use their response paper for that week to describe their motivation for the discussion questions they develop and the themes they see as central in that week’s readings. My goal in having you facilitate class is to improve your familiarity with diverse theoretical and empirical perspectives, and to enhance your ability to identify themes and any limitations in this literature.

3. **Research Paper** (60 percent of your course grade.)
   • A research paper on a course-related topic of the student’s choosing that the instructor has approved. Students will discuss their ideas for this paper in class on October 23 and November 13 and present an oral summary of the paper in the last class meetings (on November 27 and December 4.) The final draft of the paper is due at 5:00 on Tuesday, December 10th (emailed, submitted on D2L, or turned into my mailbox in 217 Cramer Hall).
   • Your main assignment for this class is to write a 20-page (+/- 3 pages), double-spaced, statement of proposed research that identifies a research question, describes the theoretical, empirical, and practical motivations for the question, and provides a brief description of a potential methodological/data strategy for investigating that question. Conceptually, this assignment is most similar to a research proposal one would write in order to procure funding for a project. It is distinct from a traditional research article in that you are not going to present empirical findings, yet it is also distinct from an introductory thesis/dissertation chapter, in that your focus will be narrower.
   • Your task in this paper is to convince your reader that you have chosen an interesting and important research question that will contribute to existing literature in the subfield of sociology of mental illness as well as more broadly (i.e., to sociology in general, to health research, to policy). Once you have identified your question and its relationship to existing research, you need to articulate a coherent strategy for empirically addressing the question, including the source(s) of data you would use and how you would analyze them.
   • I would recommend the following format for your papers, although you are welcome to follow others as you see fit (I would recommend touching base with me before doing anything drastically different to make sure it would still meet the requirements of the assignment).
     1. **Abstract:** summarizes research question, justification, and research options.
     2. **Introduction and research question:** describes the research question in detail, including any sub-questions and hypotheses you would test.
3. **Background and significance**: provides the theoretical and substantive justification for your question; summarizes main findings from previous research on this topic, including a discussion of any consistent conceptual or methodological weaknesses; identifies the way your research question would help advance existing literature; identifies theoretical models, hypotheses, and justifications for them; and describes the relationship between this paper and broader issues within sociology (or public health or health policy). This will be the longest section of your paper.

4. **Research options**: discusses types of data that would be needed to answer the question, and options for obtaining and analyzing the data.

5. **Conclusion, Bibliography & appendices (as needed)**.

- **A note on writing**: Describing the background and significance of a project can be very difficult because it requires the author to process large amounts of information and condense it into an argument that is extremely focused, clear, and compelling for another reader. Most authors need to write several drafts of such proposals before they are even ready to circulate for comments. For these reasons, I urge you to embrace writing as an iterative process and to be prepared to make substantial revisions before you submit your final paper. The challenge of this assignment, as with any statement of proposed research, is to produce focused, concise, streamlined writing contained in a relatively small number of pages, rather than a higher volume with less concision. To facilitate the completion of this project, I am assigning smaller, but related, assignments earlier in the quarter:

  a. **Topic statement (due Wednesday, October 23, bring hard copy to class)**: This should be a 1-2 page statement describing your topic and stating your research question.

  b. **Detailed outline (due Wednesday, November 13, bring hard copy to class)**: This outline of your paper should restate your research question; illustrate the general structure and logic of your background and significance section; give a very brief explanation of your research options; and include a preliminary list of relevant citations. The primary goal in this assignment is to work through the logic of your literature review.

  c. **Brief in-class discussion of paper (in class on November 27 and December 4)**: students will orally present an overview of their research papers. These presentations should be no more than 5 minutes, and will allow for feedback, advice, and comments prior to the submission of the final draft of your paper.

  d. **Final paper (due Tuesday, December 10, at 5:00pm)**: approximately 20 double-spaced pages in length, including the sections outlined above (unless you have discussed an alternative with me).
COURSE OUTLINE
(subject to change with reasonable notice)

Week 1 (October 2): Overview of the Field: The sociological study of mental health & illness

Required readings (note that all required readings are available on D2L):

Supplemental readings (not required, but areas to investigate for those with interest in this topic):
23. R. Jay Turner; Blair Wheaton; Donald A. Lloyd. 1995. The Epidemiology of Social Stress American Sociological Review 60:104-125

Week 2 (October 9): Methods of Sociological Inquiry for the Study of Mental Health & Illness

Required readings:

Supplemental readings:


Week 3 (October 16): Epidemiology and the Stress Process

Required readings:

Supplemental readings:

**Week 4 (October 23): Social Roles, Organizations, and Contexts**

***Topic statement due: bring hard copy to class***
Required readings:

Supplemental readings:

Week 5 (October 30): Aging and the Life Course

Required readings:

Supplemental readings:

Week 6 (November 6): Social Structure and Inequalities I: Socioeconomic Status

Required readings:

Supplemental readings:


Week 7 (November 13): Social Structure and Inequalities II: Race/Ethnicity (Melissa at a conference on 11/13)

***Detailed paper outline due: bring hard copy to class***

**Required readings:**


**Supplemental readings:**


**Week 8 (November 20): Social Structure and Inequalities III: Gender and Sexualities**

**Required readings:**

**Supplemental readings:**


**Week 9 (November 27): Mental Health Policy and Treatment**

***Discussion of 1st Half of Research Papers***

**Required readings:**


from the National Comorbidity Survey Replication.” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 62:629-640.


5. Mechanic, David. 2007. “Mental Health Services Then and Now: Mental Health is now more a part of the Broader health Care Discussion than in Earlier Decades” *Health Affairs* 26:1548-1550.

**Supplemental readings:**


**Week 10 (December 4): Crime, the Criminal Justice System, and Responses to Mental Illness***

***Discussion of 2nd Half of Research Papers***

**Required readings:**


Supplemental readings:


**Research Papers due on Tuesday, December 10th at 5:00pm (via email, on D2L, or in my mailbox in 217 Cramer Hall)**